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SUBJECT: Haiti Disaster Competes with Domestic Priorities, but
Nigerians Still Donate

REF: STATE 6918

11. (U) Nigeria media were initially slow to report on the earthquake in Haiti. Initial reports largely derived from wire services and contained limited factual reporting on U.S. support of relief efforts. Early reporting and editorials largely criticized the failure of the Nigerian Government (GON) to respond and offer assistance. An editorial in the January 18 "Punch" newspaper ("Helping Haiti") was typical: "It is time to take that humanitarian side of us into the new decade. We urge Vice President Goodluck Jonathan to, without delay, dispatch Nigerian troops to Haiti to help in the rescue operations. Medical and paramedical personnel should accompany the soldiers. Many other countries have committed immense resources; there is no reason why Nigeria should not be prominent on that list ... It is not only the government that can help. Individuals and businesses should contribute cash and materials for onward shipment to Haiti."

12. (U) Per reftel, POLOFF contacted the Nigerian Foreign Ministry (MFA) to determine Nigeria's assistance to the Haiti earthquake relief effort. According to MFA Regions Department Director Vincent Okedion, the GON planned to donate \$1.5 million in funding. Okedion told PolOff January 27 that his government had not yet decided the mechanism or organization to which these funds would be allocated, but that "the donation would be sent soon." In addition to the federal government's contribution, Senior Special Assistant on Foreign Relations Toyin Caxton-Martins of the Lagos State Government informed PolOffs January 21 that the Rivers State Government Executive Council decided to donate one million dollars to Haiti disaster relief efforts. All Rivers State cabinet members pledged personal donations of one thousand dollars each. According to Rivers State Governor Chibuike Amechi, the state planned to send donations through President Obama's Haiti Initiative headed by former Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush "to ensure that the money and items get sent directly to the people of Haiti."

13. (U) Soon afterward, Nigerian media reported GON donations, with the "The Guardian" reporting January 21 that Senate President David Mark announced a one-million dollar donation to the people and government of Haiti "to ameliorate the pains of the massive earthquake that ravaged the country." "Leadership" also reported January 21 that the House of Representatives planned to contribute about 50,000 dollars, with each of the 360 House members expected to contribute close to 150 dollars each. BBC Hausa Service reported January 22 that Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe had travelled to New York to present the GON's donation of 1.5 million dollars for Haiti through the United Nations. Maduekwe told the BBC that the GON "will come out with a plan on how individuals and organizations can donate to relief efforts in Haiti," and added that the country "will also send professionals like doctors and engineers to assist in reconstruction efforts later."

¶4. (U) To focus Nigerian media on the U.S. humanitarian relief effort in Haiti, Mission Nigeria sent an SMS blast on January 15 with a link to the U.S. Haiti relief page on America.gov to key Nigerian media contacts. This triggered coverage in some weekend papers, positively highlighting U.S. assistance. Mission sent an updated USAID Fact Sheet number six and the Haiti Photo Gallery January 20 to highlight the U.S. "diplomacy of deeds" and encourage accurate reporting showcasing U.S. humanitarian relief efforts in Haiti. Editorial and op-ed pieces carried divergent views on U.S. humanitarian efforts, with the majority carrying positive coverage reflecting information from the materials to which the Mission had earlier directed them. An opinion article entitled "Haiti: A global human tragedy" by Orji Uzor Kalu in the January 23 "Sun" is typical: "The United States has demonstrated rare generosity and brotherliness by the massive number of personnel it has drafted to Haiti to help in the search and rescue operations. This is aside from the 100 million it pledged in aid and reconstruction."

¶5. (U) As the story developed, we observed further placements of U.S. public diplomacy materials, and media reports consistently highlighted U.S. relief efforts in largely positive terms, although a few, less influential local media reprinted some of the initial negative international press stories. The U.S. Mission is also using the presence of a senior Nigerian naval officer on the Africa

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Partnership Station ship USS "Gunston Hall," redeployed to Haiti, to highlight U.S. support. We placed a photo of U.S. and Nigerian naval personnel in Haiti and arranged a telephone interview January 26 between the Nigerian press and the Nigerian naval officer.

COMMENT

¶6. (SBU) Overall, media coverage of the earthquake in Haiti continued to take a back seat to several high-profile domestic issues, including the January 17 outbreak of communal violence in Jos. END COMMENT.

¶7. (U) Embassy coordinated this telegram with ConGen Lagos.
SANDERS